

TWITTER FOR EDUCATORS:

A GLOBAL NETWORK OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

AE TEACHER'S CORNER



Image by edar from Pixabay

Educators around the world use Facebook to engage with resources, webinars, and communities provided by English Language Programs. There is an excellent chance you are reading this very article because you saw the link posted in the Teacher's Corner Facebook group or on the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Exchange's Facebook page. These spaces continue to grow with interesting conversations and with new participants joining daily. At the same time, Facebook and its many functions and filters can overwhelm some educators who are looking to use social media to enhance their teaching. In this Teacher's Corner, we suggest English language educators experiment with a second form of social media: Twitter. Global educators use this social media platform as a powerful tool for professional growth and learning opportunities. In this article, we'll show you how to use Twitter, and we'll share how you can build your professional network within an active social platform being used by educators worldwide.

How to Use Twitter as an English Language Educator

Tweet & Retweet

Publishing on Twitter is a simple four-step process. (1) Register for an account, then (2) verify your account by responding to the welcome email from Twitter, (3) log in to your Twitter account in either a browser window or the mobile app, and finally, (4) compose and post your ideas, thoughts, reflections, and insights. You might link to additional resources, videos, and websites. You might attach photos and images to illustrate your words or even a moving GIF. Depending upon your Internet access, you may even broadcast live video from Twitter.



Dan Ryder [presented at @SDCC San Diego ComicCon]
@WickedDecent

There are hundreds and hundreds of wonderful, FREE resources for English language learning at americanenglish.state.gov #TESOL #ELL #teachingEnglish



Each post on Twitter is called a **tweet**. Your ongoing list of tweets is known as your **feed**. Some users will publish a string of related tweets known as a **thread**. And from time to time, users will publish a massive series of tweets in rapid succession called a **tweetstorm**.

Educators can post a broad array of different tweets, such as sharing pictures of students working on a project in class, suggesting an effective technique for learning language with a link to supporting materials, or reflecting on the week's lessons and what went well and what needs improvement. In this way, Twitter becomes what some call a **microblog**, a record of your experiences and ideas broken up into very small chunks.

The strength of Twitter comes from its interactive features. After searching Twitter for topics or educators of interest to you, and finding tweets you find meaningful or valuable, you can click the two-arrow icon underneath to share that idea yourself, a process known as **retweeting**. Twitter invites its users to add their comments when retweeting, allowing your voice to be heard alongside the original idea. Commenting when retweeting is a great way to explain why you are sharing this idea and contribute your own insights.

You might also reply to a tweet using the word balloon icon, starting a dialogue between yourself and the original tweet poster. Because these conversations are happening in a public forum on Twitter, the opportunities for other educators to join in and create robust discussions are numerous.

For example, here, you see the “Retweet” button at the bottom of a Tweet:



When you click the “Retweet” button, there are two options: Retweet and Retweet with comment.



You can add a comment as a Retweet to add to the context or conversation:



Use Hashtags

The rapid growth of social media has been accompanied by the widespread use of **hashtags** to label (or “tag”), organize, and describe content posted on the Internet. Tweets about sports might include #NBA or #WorldCup, while tweets about dancing might be as broad as #ballet or even #dance. Educators on Twitter use hashtags to connect with others around common concerns and interests, to build active communities and networks, and to identify relevant information and ideas. There are no rules governing the use of hashtags on Twitter—one may add any hashtag to any tweet. However, it is important that users apply hashtags that help others find the resources and educators that will be most interested in those tweets.

Similarly, it is important to give credit to other users on Twitter when they inspire our thinking. To do so, simply **tag** the other person using @ and their user name, which is also called a **handle**. Thus, I might thank @elprograms and @jacquiegardy for providing hundreds of open education resources on the English Language Programs website.

Here is a list of some of the most dynamic education hashtags today:

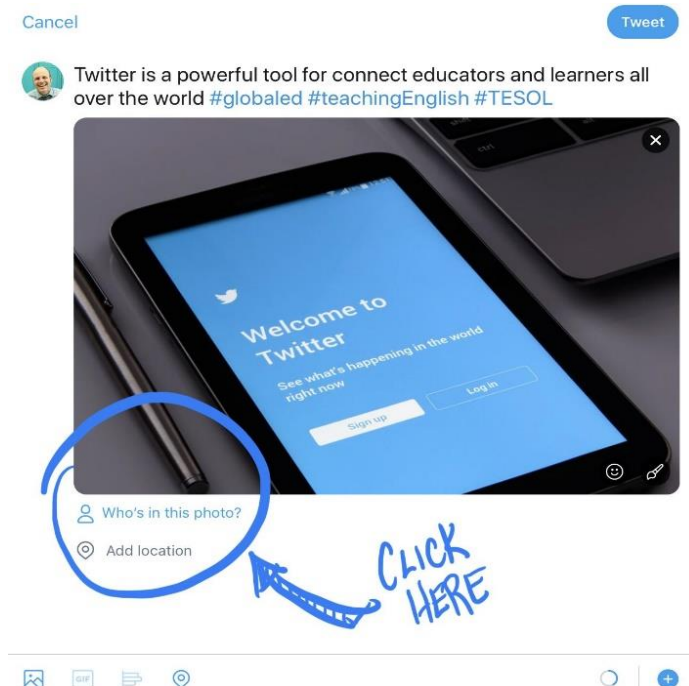
1. #K12Global
2. #GlobalEd
3. #DigCit
4. #TESOL
5. #ELL
6. #EFL
7. #Edchat
8. #EdTech
9. #MakerEd
10. #DTK12chat

Many educators create unique hashtags for their fellow teachers and staff, their schools and learning centers, and even students to use. Often educators use established hashtags such as #globaled and

#TESOL to better ensure their words and ideas find their desired audience. Searching for hashtags can be one of the best ways to find communities of educators with similar goals. For example, #WhatIsSchool is a worldwide community that emerged from educators wanting to redefine education, and #DigCit is global community centered around teaching students to be safe and healthy digital citizens.

Tag Photos

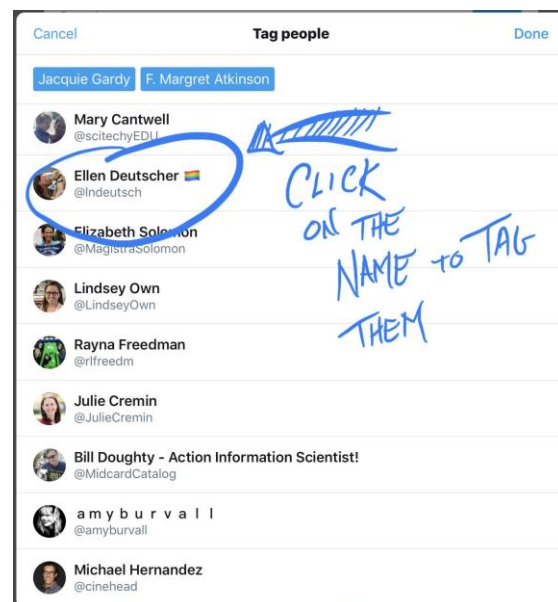
Sharing photos on Twitter is very easy and helps people notice your ideas. The images grab attention and tell a more complete story of the work happening in your classes or illustrate the point you are trying to make. You might take screenshots of work on your device or take a picture of students at work. If you do post pictures of students, be careful to protect their privacy. Many educators avoid including students' faces when sharing classroom images, omit students' names and identifying information, and sometimes even only show images of students' hands.



To make photos an even more effective way to reach your audience, you may tag up to ten other Twitter users in the photo. To tag other Twitter users, click the “Who’s in this photo” button underneath the image. Once you post your image, tagged users will receive a notification. They will receive further notifications each time another user interacts with your post through a reply or a retweet. Tagging other Twitter users is an excellent way to give credit to another educator who has inspired your thinking or to build community around a key idea or resource.

Length of Tweets

When Twitter first launched, it was well known for its 140-character limit, including spaces, numbers, and symbols. This meant that tweets had to be succinct and say a great deal with only a few words. Many users described Twitter as Facebook if



Facebook was status messages and nothing else. With the character limit came a great deal of creativity as Twitter developed a lexicon of its own. The abbreviations and acronyms that developed made it possible to pack even more meaning into a single tweet. However, those abbreviations also alienated a lot of potential users who found it difficult to engage in conversations in so-called “**TwitterSpeak**” and the even more specialized “**EduTwitterSpeak**” educators on Twitter had come to use.¹

Recently, Twitter expanded its character limit to 280 characters. With the additional space, educators can provide important context and explanations, making Twitter far more accessible to casual users and much more valuable to educators.

Using Twitter to Enhance Teaching and Learning

With a basic understanding of how to use Twitter, educators can have an immediate impact on their students’ and their colleagues’ professional development. In the following section, we will explore three different strategies for educators who want to use Twitter for teaching.

Curate a Collection

When gathering links to online resources such as articles, lessons, exercises, and videos, consider sharing each link as a tweet accompanied by a common hashtag as well as a hashtag related to a larger Twitter learning community.

For example, you might be working with students who speak Farsi as their first language, and you discover a number of helpful YouTube videos that you want to share with your students and others. On Twitter, (1) create a hashtag, such as #FarsiELLvids, and compose a tweet with a link to the video with a brief description and reaction or comment. (2) Add a widely used hashtag to help reach a wider audience such as #TESOL or #globaled. Finally, (3) if you can find the creator(s) of the video on Twitter, tag them so you can give proper credit for the resource.

The end result would read something like “I cannot wait to show my students this video from @farsitranslators that explains how to translate common phrases from Farsi into American English #FarsiELLvids #TESOL [link].”

¹ For more Twitter terminology, visit <https://help.twitter.com/en/glossary>

Then anyone can click your hashtag and see all of the other #FarsiELLvids you have shared. This could be helpful for students who want to move at their own pace through a course or for colleagues looking for resources. It can also be helpful for others who want to contribute to your efforts by tweeting links to other videos and tagging them with #FarsiELLvids.

Continue a Conversation

There's no substitute for face-to-face discussion and the power of human connections. Still, there are only so many minutes in a class or to meet with fellow educators. Twitter makes an excellent forum for class and professional discussions. The character limits help keep any one voice from dominating the conversation, and the online format allows time for participants to process and edit their ideas before tweeting them.

When conducting a classroom discussion or a staff meeting, consider extending the conversation on Twitter afterward. Extending the conversation to Twitter is particularly valuable when that discussion revolves around best teaching practices, challenging questions, and study skills.

To extend or continue a discussion on Twitter, start by (1) creating a hashtag that unites everyone in the group. It might be a nickname for the class or the name of your learning community. Then (2) try using the Q1/A1 format to keep track of questions and answers to that question. When posing the first question use "Q1." For example, you could tweet "Q1 What are some of the most effective ways to practice conjugating verbs? #LimaRoom200". (3) When members of your group answer, they should respond using the term "A1." For example: "A1 Write original song lyrics that use all three past tense singular and plural of the verb #LimaRoom200". (4) As the discussion continues, new questions from the moderator should be numbered appropriately (Q2, Q3, Q4, etc.).

Of course, you do not have to use the formal Q1/A1 system. Twitter is a wonderful place for sharing ideas and thoughts and replying to those of others. Just use hashtags to help the participants find the discussion and return to it at a later date as new ideas come to mind.

Create a Comic Using Images or Drawings

Twitter can also be used as a tool by students for creative expression and to demonstrate learning. For example, usually, images that are posted on Twitter are used to add information or context to the ideas presented in the tweet. What if the tweet was instead treated like a caption?

Ask your students to find an image or draw a simple one-panel comic depicting a situation in which one character is asking another character for help:

- (1) Ask them to doodle or sketch that image or use one of the many other ways you can make comics shown in this [webinar](#) from American English.
- (2) Then, instruct your students to write a caption for the image.

The caption can involve the language or grammar point students are currently learning. For instance, students can practice language for asking for help with a specific task—a critical skill for interacting with people from other cultures. As an example, one comic might depict a young man carrying a rowboat at the top of a large mountain and asking a friendly woman, “Could you please tell me how to get to the Baltic Sea?” Another comic might depict a young girl conducting a science experiment, standing over a model of a volcano, and asking her father, “Would you please put on your safety goggles, pass me the vinegar, and hide behind me?”

A comic with a funny caption is a classic form of illustration, going all the way back to the first



Dan Ryder [presented at @SDCC San Diego ComicCon] @Wi... · 1m
"Please help me, Sofia! All of the icons on my screen look like candy and I'm getting too hungry to keep working! How do I change them to look like rocks instead?" [#languagelearning](#) [#technologyterminology](#) [#criticalcreativity](#)



Jacquie Gardy and English Language Programs



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"Samira has been working at the Irony Cafe for two years. She is using a giant machine to make the world's smallest cup of coffee for her customers." [#learninglanguage](#) [#ironyexamples](#) (photo from [@ayahya09](#) [@unsplash](#)) [#criticalcreativity](#)



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1:56 PM · Jul 25, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

published newspapers, pamphlets, posters, books and magazines. Twitter allows us to amplify our students' voices as well as our own and reach a global audience that otherwise might never hear us.

Twitter should not be seen as a substitute for what already works in your classroom or your learning community. Moreover, it isn't as useful as Facebook for long-term discussions and for storing videos, photos, and other information for students. The [Teacher's Corner Facebook group](#), the [American English for Educators Facebook page](#), and the [American English at State Facebook page](#) are still the best places to connect with other teachers of American English. Twitter is another tool that offers some unique opportunities for you to grow right alongside your students—280 characters at a time!

Next Steps

Please join us as we explore this topic in further depth on the Teacher's Corner Facebook group from the American English for Educators page (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators/>). Each Monday we post something new for you to explore or do. To join the group, go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AETeachersCorner/> and request to join. You will be asked to respond to three questions. If you do not answer all three questions, you will not be admitted to the group. We hope to see you there!



Image by Thomas Ulrich from Pixabay

Special thanks to our contributing author this month, Dan Ryder. Find him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/WickedDecent>